

At last check, Congress's approval rating stood at 9 percent, prompting columnist Cal Thomas to note that polygamy and human cloning rate higher among the American public. Certainly, Congress has in many ways earned its low regard.

For one, the national debt is \$15 trillion and counting, billable to the American taxpayer. The President and Congress have repeatedly failed to enact yearly budget plans, creating the need for emergency stop-gap measures. While the House last year was able to put the brakes on some of the spending, more than 1,000 days have passed since the Senate approved any kind of budget proposal. In the meantime, the President has asked for \$200 billion more in federal spending.

Beyond all of this, political considerations appear to trump creative policymaking at every turn. Partisan bickering and gamesmanship seem to make good faith efforts at collaborative problem-solving nearly impossible. There is plenty of blame to go around.

With such discord within the halls of Congress one of the most refreshing aspects of my job continues to be direct interactions with Nebraskans both back at home and in DC. On recent workdays in the state, I invited constituents to come to my Lincoln and Norfolk offices to meet with me personally. We have found that some people prefer such personal exchanges to the larger setting of open townhall meetings, which we also continue to hold most years during the month of August.

The "Open House" meetings allow anyone who wishes to speak with me the opportunity to express thoughts and concerns regarding any federal matter. As you might imagine, this leads to some extensive conversations on everything from government overspending and overreach to ensuring the long-term solvency of important retirement programs like Social Security. This insight from Nebraskans - retired folks, farmers, small business owners, concerned moms and dads - is invaluable and it helps inform my decisions in Washington.

I also find hope in various community visits during my time at home. This week I was able to review the operations of a small manufacturing firm in Plattsmouth. The young owner started the business in true entrepreneurial fashion, leasing machinery on the weekends to develop ideas for new products. He took great pride in telling me, "In our shop, we want everything made in America." His is a family business that, through innovation and hard work, has grown

rapidly over recent years and created new jobs in the process – a great model for national economic recovery. Later that day, I had the opportunity to visit with a number of Sarpy County and Bellevue business and community leaders, discussing the great opportunities and challenges brought about by steady growth and development in their area.

The week before I had the pleasure of welcoming several Nebraskans to our nation's capital, including a group of students from Milford High School. These young people were particularly engaged in their surroundings. I was impressed by their perceptive questions about the legislative process and the durability of our form of governance.

These experiences with Nebraskans - who are all in their own unique ways contributing to "the good life" in our state - are like breathing fresh air given Washington's incivility and ineffectiveness. They also offer the hope that good people engaged in the civic process can help change it for the better, restoring dignity to our institutions of representative government and increasing public confidence in our ability to work together for the good of all Americans.